

September 25, 2000

A Quick Look at Congressional History

Congress Has Passed All the Funding Bills On Time Only Twice in 23 Years

The ideal: Report, debate, amend, pass, conference, pass again, and send to the President — by October 1 — all 13 of the regular appropriations bills that fund the federal government. That, after all, is the law.

The reality: It doesn't usually work that way.

The record: Only *twice since 1977* has the Congress completed its work on all 13 funding bills in time for the President to sign them by the October 1 deadline.

What does this mean? Perhaps only that it's a tough process, no matter which party controls the Congress, and no matter which party controls the White House.

Here's the history, based on the final edition for each year of the Calendars of the U.S. House of Representatives and History of Legislation (and on the Senate Library's online appropriations tables):

— Only seven times since 1977 has the Congress passed all 13 appropriations bills as freestanding vehicles: 1997, 1994, 1993, 1992, 1990, 1989, and 1988.

— Of those seven years noted above, *only twice – in 1988 and in 1994 – were those 13 bills/conference reports passed by the Congress by October 1*. The date we used for our research is the date the Congress gave its final approval to a piece of legislation (usually in the form of a voice or roll call vote on a conference report), not the date the bill landed on the President's desk nor the date signed.

— Of the other five years in which Congress did pass all 13 bills *eventually*, here's the date(s) the *final* funding bill was given final Congressional approval [note the dates below represent final congressional action; the President's signature may be days later]:

- 1997: three conference reports passed on November 13. Only four bills were finalized by October 1.

- 1993: Defense, H.R. 3116, passed November 10. Only two bills were finalized by October 1.
- 1992: Defense, Foreign Ops, and Legislative Branch passed October 5. Only six bills were finalized prior to October 1, and three more finalized on October 1.
- 1990: Transportation and Military Construction both passed October 28. *None* of the regular appropriations bills was given final Congressional approval by October 1 in 1990.
- 1989: Three bills – District of Columbia, Foreign Assistance, and Labor/HHS/Education– were given final passage on November 20. Only one bill was given final congressional approval by October 1, 1989.

Of the other 16 years examined by RPC (dating back to 1977), Congress never passed all 13 appropriations bills. In two of those years — 1986 and 1987 — *Congress failed to forward to the President a single freestanding appropriation bill*. In those years, all 13 bills were bundled into and passed as part of a continuing resolution. On three other occasions, Congress was still finalizing the appropriations process after the New Year began (1995-96, 1991-1992, and 1981-82).

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The law providing the timetable for the appropriations process is the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, P.L. 93-344, (titles I-IX).